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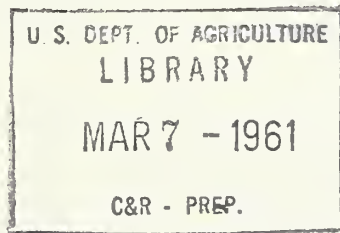
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# **Watershed Organization Appraisal**

## **East Willow Creek Pilot Project in Minnesota**



**Agricultural Research Service  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

Prepared in  
Farm Economics Research Division  
Agricultural Research Service  
United States Department of Agriculture

## P R E F A C E

This report was prepared in accordance with provisions of the Memorandum of Agreement between the Soil Conservation Service and the Agricultural Research Service of March 1955, relating to services to be furnished by the Farm Economics Research Division, Agricultural Research Service, under the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program, and under the annual renewals of the agreement.

The purpose of the report is to describe how the East Willow Creek Watershed Project was organized and established and what functions were performed by various organizations, agencies, and individuals. The report deals primarily with the structure of the watershed government and the relationships of its elements with respect to the watershed protection objectives. The survey was limited to those aspects of organization and administration that dealt with the planning and construction of works of improvement contained in the watershed project. It did not consider the complexity of organizational responsibility for future operation and maintenance of structure.

The report is based on a review of records relating to the watershed and information obtained in interviewing farmers in the watershed, businessmen in the adjoining town of Preston, and a number of local and Federal officials. Appreciation is expressed to all those who cooperated in furnishing information for the report.



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## WATERSHED ORGANIZATION APPRAISAL EAST WILLOW CREEK PILOT PROJECT IN MINNESOTA

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### HIGHLIGHTS IN THE SUCCESS OF THE PROJECT

Why was this project, which was intended to provide protection for and improvement of the land and water resources in the watershed, a success in administration?

The coordinated and sustained effort made to solve flood and erosion problems explains much of the success. As one person expressed it, there was "concentration and cooperation."

Informed and experienced personnel of the Soil Conservation Service explained to an existing organization, the West Fillmore Soil Conservation District board of supervisors, the pilot watershed program for which the Congress had appropriated funds. The supervisors were convinced that such a program in the East Willow Creek Watershed area was desirable. They enlisted the support of the Preston Lions Club, financially, in publishing and furnishing general information to each farmer in the area, and inviting each to a meeting at which the pilot watershed program was explained.

Because of the favorable response at this initial meeting by the farmers in the area and the businessmen of Preston, the area conservationist of the Soil Conservation Service and the supervisors of the Soil Conservation District decided that a steering committee of farmers in the watershed should be appointed to determine whether the farmers in the area wanted to carry out a soil and water conservation program.

Members of the steering committee were selected on the basis of leadership in their neighborhoods and as cooperators in the Soil Conservation Service program. The selection of the chairman was significant. He was well known in the watershed area for his farm conservation practices and respected as a strong community leader. The committee was given responsibility and authority to work with the farmers and develop plans for the watershed program. Committee members met individually with their neighbors to explain what the watershed program might mean to them. Often, they had the assistance of personnel of the Soil Conservation Service and the County Extension Service. Members of the committee represented no special interests; they acted equally for all people in the watershed, giving their time unselfishly to the public interest. No pay was received.

The supervisors of the Soil Conservation District and SCS personnel worked only through the steering committee. The watershed program was a program of the farmers in the area.

Many organizations cooperated with the committee to develop favorable public opinion and to achieve understanding of and stimulate interest in the program. Activities included tours and meetings in the watershed, demonstrations of soil conservation practices and tree-planting methods, both hand and machine, essay contests, dissemination of information through newspapers and radio and television stations, and the watershed-dedication ceremony.

From a financial standpoint, there is significance in the way the local share of the cost of the watershed program was met. Farmers donated easements and rights-of-way for gully stabilization and flood-detention structures. Most of the cost for construction of these structures was paid by the Federal Government, but Fillmore County and Carimona and Bristol Townships made some contributions in services and from general revenue funds on the basis that these structures would result in savings in maintaining roads, highways, and bridges. The county agreed to maintain the structures. Farmers applied land-treatment measures, with the Federal Government paying a part of the cost.

Because of the earlier work of SCS personnel with the farmers in the East Willow Creek watershed area, more than half the farmers in the area were Soil Conservation District cooperators when the program was initiated. With a majority of the farmers cooperating in soil conservation practices and with the many organizations, agencies, and other activities supporting the watershed program, it was not difficult to convince many other farmers of the value to be derived from the program.

Here was unity and integration of effort, with Federal, State, and local agencies and organizations working with farmers and local civic groups. Most important was the recognition of local responsibility. The initiative for developing and establishing the watershed program came mainly from the sponsoring Soil Conservation District and the steering committee of farmers of the watershed.

## INTRODUCTION

The East Willow Creek Watershed project is one of 65 selected for a pilot program under authority of a Department of Agriculture appropriation act for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1954, to be administered in accordance with the provisions of the basic legislation that established the Soil Conservation Service. Some 50 of these projects became operational.

Analyses contained in this report do not consider specifically the influence of the expected incidence of benefits and costs of the project as they relate to the administration of the project goals. A survey to evaluate the economic impacts of the project measures on a sample basis is currently underway. This study has not progressed far enough to provide definitive results.

### Location, Size, and Economy

The East Willow Creek Watershed lies in the south-central part of Fillmore County in southeastern Minnesota. The county borders Iowa to the south and is one county removed from Wisconsin to the east. The watershed drains an area of some 24,000 acres of rolling land in some 150 farms. Incomes are derived chiefly from farming in the watershed area and from business in the adjoining town of Preston.





SCS Mn-175-2

Flood prevention and conservation farming in the East Willow Creek Watershed.

### Flood and Erosion Problems

The watershed area is subject to intense storms. Floodwaters have destroyed crops, torn out fences, and wrecked bridges. Erosion, caused by runoff, proved to be the most costly single damage. Each year some 280,000 tons of topsoil are washed from farm fields, leaving gullies, silting rich bottom lands, clogging road ditches, and occasionally leaving a layer of sticky mud in living rooms and basements.

To reduce these damages, flood-detention and gully-stabilization structures were to be constructed over a 5-year period, and land-treatment measures were to be applied.

## Financing the Project

The division of cost among Federal, non-Federal-Public, and private sources for flood-detention and gully-stabilization structures was as follows:

<u>Item</u>	<u>Dollars</u>
Federal:	
Plans -----	20,671
Contract-----	147,976
Construction supervision -----	9,768
Total -----	<u>178,415</u>
Non-Federal-Public:	
Soil Conservation District* -----	470
County -----	8,006
Townships -----	3,440
Total -----	<u>11,916</u>
Private:	
Land -----	7,515
Waterway-----	2,440
Fence removal -----	244
Fencing -----	1,390
Establishing vegetation-----	1,170
Total -----	<u>12,759</u>
Grand total -----	<u>203,090</u>

\*The Soil Conservation District assumed responsibility for maintaining the structures. Arrangements were made with the county to finance such maintenance. It was estimated that this would cost about \$37,000 over a 50-year period.

In the application by farmers of land-treatment measures for the conservation of soil and water resources, the farmer and the Federal Government, through its going programs, have shared about equally in the cost.

## FUNCTIONS OF VARIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

As part of the Agricultural Appropriation Act for the fiscal year 1954 (Public Law 156 - 83d Congress, approved July 28, 1953) funds were appropriated to start demonstrations of combined soil conservation and flood-control work in small watersheds under the basic enabling authority of Public Law 46 - 74th Congress. The Soil Conservation Service was assigned the responsibility for approving the areas to serve as pilot watersheds, and for helping local groups with technical phases of the work.

After discussions between the SCS State Conservationist and the area conservationist concerned, in August 1953, the latter met informally several times with the



board of supervisors of the West Fillmore Soil Conservation District to explain the purpose of the pilot watershed program. As it was agreed that such a program for the East Willow Creek Watershed was desirable, the next consideration was to learn how farmers in the watershed and the people of Preston felt about it. The board of supervisors next enlisted the assistance of Preston businessmen in calling a general meeting of the farmers in the watershed. Through the Lions Club, the businessmen invited all farmers in the watershed to a meeting in Preston in November 1953, explaining, in leaflets they printed and mailed to the farmers, what a watershed project might mean to the community.

The area conservationist then went back to the board of supervisors to discuss methods of organizing a program under which the practices and measures necessary and feasible to achieve the maximum practical reduction of erosion, floodwater, and sediment damages in the East Willow Creek Watershed could be applied. At the first meeting, the area conservationist, most members of the board of supervisors, and later all of the supervisors, agreed that a steering committee of farmers in the watershed should be appointed to study the problems, determine what should be done, and see whether the farmers in the area wanted to carry out a watershed project.

Early in 1954, the Soil Conservation District board appointed a steering committee of 12 farmers to serve in an advisory capacity. The committee, in turn, was free to appoint additional members and to replace members as they saw fit. Eventually, the committee consisted of 17 members. Following appointment of the committee, members began to conduct informal meetings with neighboring farmers to explain the watershed project.

To serve as a guide in working with farmers and in developing a plan for carrying out the watershed project, the steering committee had the benefit of a work plan for the watershed, prepared in 1953 and revised in 1955 mainly by technicians of the Soil Conservation Service. This survey included an appraisal of the watershed's resources, problems, and possible solutions.

The first contract for the construction of detention dams and gully-stabilization structures was awarded in July 1954. The entire construction program, which included 6 detention dams and 16 gully-stabilization structures, was completed in 1958, and a project dedication ceremony was held in August of the same year.

Some of the main functions of the steering committee and of other organizations and agencies in planning and establishing the watershed project are listed below.

#### West Fillmore Soil Conservation District

- (1) Served as sponsor of the watershed project;
- (2) Explained the project plan to the Preston Lions Club and solicited its cooperation;
- (3) Prescribed methods for explaining the project to individual landowners of the watershed;
- (4) Assisted in developing a work plan, listing the work to be done in a 5-year period, and working out a division of the costs between local and Federal organizations. Assisted also in revising the work plan as the project developed;

- (5) In consultation with the County Extension Service, the local Preston banker, the Soil Conservation Service and others, developed general plans for establishing a watershed steering committee. This committee consisted of farmers representing all areas of the watershed. Made sure the committee fully understood and appreciated its responsibilities and authority;
- (6) Gave guidance to the steering committee in carrying out its work;
- (7) Took final action in obtaining and recording easements for all structural sites at a cost of \$1 each;
- (8) Made arrangements for assuring maintenance of the structures, once they were built and turned over to the district;
- (9) In cooperation with other organizations, planned and conducted field days to encourage farmers to participate and to give them information on the watershed project. These field days included two major events – Timberama (tree-planting demonstration) and Dam-O-Rama (dedication ceremony for the watershed);
- (10) Planned tours and meetings in the watershed; and
- (11) Held the district annual meeting and banquet in one of the churches in the watershed.

#### Watershed Steering Committee

- (1) Arranged and conducted small neighborhood meetings of farmers in the watershed, informing them of the work plan and the part each might play in helping to carry it out;
- (2) Assisted in explaining to the farmers concerned how costs of each structure and benefits to be derived therefrom were determined;
- (3) Held regular monthly meetings to review accomplishments, discuss committee plans, and keep the Soil Conservation District informed;
- (4) Assisted in making changes and revisions in the project work plan;
- (5) Encouraged the application of land-treatment measures and scheduled dates for construction of structures, based on the time the land-treatment measures were applied;
- (6) Influenced landowners to give land easements for structural sites;
- (7) Conducted many tours of the watershed and many information meetings with visiting outside groups;
- (8) Explained the project and its organization to other interested groups throughout southeastern Minnesota; and
- (9) Assisted in planning and conducting the watershed dedication ceremony known as Dam-O-Rama.

### Preston Lions Club

- (1) At the request of the West Fillmore Soil Conservation District, sent each farmer in the watershed a letter of general information, followed by an invitation to a communitywide meeting, at which the project as a whole was first presented. The club arranged space and luncheon for the 100 people attending;
- (2) Paid for the cost of a brochure entitled "Quiet Waters," which outlined the project plan;
- (3) In cooperation with the local schools, conducted an essay contest on watershed protection;
- (4) Helped to stimulate and maintain farm and city interest in the watershed project;
- (5) Assisted in the planning and carrying out of Dam-O-Rama; and
- (6) Held a dinner at which the work of the Soil Conservation District board and the watershed steering committee was recognized.

### Preston Boosters Club

- (1) Helped to stimulate and maintain communitywide interest in the project;
- (2) Recognized the Soil Conservation District board and the watershed steering committee at a dinner in the third year of the project; and
- (3) Assisted in planning and carrying out Dam-O-Rama.

### Soil Conservation Service

- (1) In 1953, prepared an interim report on the East Willow Creek Watershed;
- (2) Appraised watershed damages, developed a proposed watershed program evaluating benefits therefrom, and assisted otherwise in development of the watershed project work plan;
- (3) Assisted the steering committee at neighborhood meetings, in presenting watershed problems, information as to soils, and recommended land-treatment measures;
- (4) Provided technical advice to the Soil Conservation District to assist farmers in developing conservation plans and applying land-treatment measures;
- (5) Furnished engineering help to prepare plans for watershed structures and for supervision of construction;
- (6) Contracted for the 16 stabilizing and 6 floodwater-retarding structures, which were built as part of the watershed plan; and
- (7) Assisted with the arrangements and the carrying out of Dam-O-Rama.



### Agricultural Extension Service

- (1) Assisted the steering committee in conducting group meetings;
- (2) Developed a tour guide of the watershed, so organized that people could take their own tours of the project;
- (3) Conducted an educational program through newspapers, meetings, demonstrations, and tours; and
- (4) Assisted with the arrangements and the carrying out of Dam-O-Rama.

### Fillmore County

- (1) The County Board of Commissioners, County Engineer, and other county officials supported the entire project;
- (2) Contributed \$8,006 to the cost of construction of structures that benefited county roads and bridges;
- (3) Agreed to finance all costs of structure maintenance; and
- (4) Took an active part in the conduct of Dam-O-Rama.

### Townships - Bristol and Carimona

- (1) The town boards gave full support to the project from the beginning;
- (2) Contributed \$3,440 in cash to the cost of construction of structures that benefited their roads and bridges;
- (3) Furnished sites for structures that were connected with their roads and bridges; and
- (4) Served as fire wardens for the area and stationed fire-fighting equipment at central points.

### Vocational and Veteran Agricultural Instructors

- (1) Conducted tours of the watershed for their classes;
- (2) Assisted in the essay contest sponsored by the Lions Club; and
- (3) Assisted in the planning and carrying out of Dam-O-Rama.

### United States Forest Service

- (1) Assisted in the development of the project work plan; and
- (2) Furnished technical help to the Soil Conservation District for tree-planting and woodland-management phases of the project.

### Minnesota Department of Conservation

- (1) Furnished basic information to be used in preparing parts of the work plan;
- (2) Supplied tree-planting stock for Timberama; and
- (3) Furnished fire-fighting equipment to be operated by the town boards.

### Churches

- (1) The clergy promoted interest in conservation by using the topic for sermons on soil-stewardship day and on other occasions;
- (2) The brotherhoods held meetings to review watershed progress and to promote community interest; and
- (3) Participated in carrying out Dam-O-Rama.

### Bankers

- (1) Sponsored exhibits at the county fair and in Preston showing the watershed project;
- (2) Furnished a tree planter for farmers to hire; and
- (3) Assisted in the planning and carrying out of Dam-O-Rama.

### Watershed Farmers

- (1) Gave cooperation and support to this communitywide project;
- (2) Gave to the Soil Conservation District land easements to be used for structural sites;
- (3) Installed and are using the essential land-treatment measures; which include contour strips, terraces, waterways, and changes in land use; and
- (4) One farmer furnished the site for Dam-O-Rama.

Thus it may be seen that many organizations and individuals cooperated and combined their efforts in successfully organizing and establishing the watershed project. Opinions of those interviewed follow.

### INFORMATION OBTAINED FROM INTERVIEWS

Those interviewed were 10 farmers, 4 present or former local officials (also farmers), 4 businessmen, 2 Federal-State-county officials, and 2 Federal officials. Most of them were asked one of the following questions in the priority listed.

- (1) What made the watershed a success?
- (2) What caused people to support the establishment of the watershed? or
- (3) What motivated people to support the watershed and why did the movement succeed?

Most interviewees gave more than one reason for the success of the project. Some gave many reasons. Several mentioned values or benefits expected from the project, which are considered under a separate category at the end of this section. Following, in the order listed, is a condensation of the replies most frequently made to the questions asked.

### Steering Committee

Members of the steering committee were selected because they were leaders in their neighborhoods and Soil Conservation District cooperators.

Not all members originally appointed to the committee attended meetings regularly. The committee replaced these members and appointed additional ones.

The committee's first job was to acquaint farmers in the area with what was needed of them in order to have a successful watershed project. To do this, committee members arranged for small group meetings in farmers' homes, at which representatives of the County Extension office and the Soil Conservation Service presented technical information to the farmers.

The committee was effective because its membership represented all neighborhoods in the watershed. These neighborhood representatives, together with Soil Conservation Service personnel and other agricultural workers, met frequently with their neighbors to explain what the watershed project would mean to them.

The success of the project lay in convincing the committee that it was their — the farmers' — program and that if it wanted the project, it must decide what it wanted and organize in a way that would get it. Also, the fact that activity was continuous, that is, that monthly meetings of the steering committee and frequent meetings of committee members with their neighbors were held, had much to do with the success of the project.

Meetings of the steering committee were held often enough to maintain constant interest in the watershed program.

The committee was in doubt as to how much authority it had. The board of supervisors of the Soil Conservation District told the committee that it should select structural sites or veto certain sites, based on the extent to which land-treatment measures had or had not been applied and on other pertinent factors, favorable or unfavorable.

Each site was inspected by the committee, which either approved the site or rejected it if protection was not satisfactory.

The committee called joint meetings with the board of supervisors from time to time to keep the latter advised of the steering committee's progress.

The committee influenced many farmers who had not done so before to apply conservation practices.

Members of the steering committee spent much of their time, without pay, in promoting the watershed project when they might have been working on their farms.



The steering committee was fortunate in selecting as its chairman a farmer who followed sound conservation practices, who lived near the center of the watershed, and who was a strong natural leader.

In explaining technical aspects of the project, often with assistance of Soil Conservation Service technicians and the County Agent's office, the committee was probably most responsible for the success of the watershed program.

The chairman of the steering committee had more to do with the accomplishment of the watershed program than any other person. This was realized through his strong leadership and his example of applied, sound farm conservation practices to restore the productiveness of the badly eroded farm he had bought several years earlier.

Cooperation of neighbors with neighbors and of the steering committee with civic and business groups was largely responsible for the success of the project.

The watershed program might not have succeeded had it not been for the amount of time and energy the chairman of the steering committee and some of its members put into the program.

Perhaps 90 percent of the success of the watershed program was due to the steering committee.

The outstanding work carried on by the steering committee consisted of the preparatory work needed before construction was begun. Committee members visited neighbors to encourage and see to it that practices on the land were there before structural measures were contracted for. They secured easements and rights-of-way (and other agreements from cooperators) at no cost except the legal fee of \$1 needed to bind each such agreement.

The steering committee was the working committee for the watershed. Other agencies worked through it – gave members ideas when necessary.

### Soil Conservation Service

The area conservationist of the Soil Conservation Service held several meetings with the Soil Conservation District board of supervisors to explain the pilot watershed program. In turn, he and the supervisors explained the program to the Lions Club, which mailed invitations to each farmer in the watershed to attend a general meeting to hear what a watershed program would mean to them.

Meetings of steering committee members with their neighbors were attended by SCS technicians to assist in explaining the technical aspects of the watershed project. (This was mentioned by several interviewees.)

Farmers in general were ready for the watershed program. SCS employees had done considerable work with the farmers before the East Willow Creek Watershed organization was initiated. Thus the principles of soil conservation had already been sold to many.

When the project was initiated, more than half of the farmers in the area were Soil Conservation District cooperators. With the soil conservation practices already applied, it was not difficult to convince others of their value.

A farm planner of the Soil Conservation Service was particularly successful in getting farmers to apply soil conservation practices. This work and that of the SCS work unit conservationist had much to do with the accomplishment of the watershed project.

SCS farm planners played a major part in getting farmers to cooperate in the watershed program. Other SCS technicians helped to sell the program. (Many other interviewees mentioned that farm planners were very effective in convincing individual farmers that they should apply farm conservation practices.)

### County Extension Service

The county agent or a member of his staff attended most meetings of steering committee members with their neighbors to assist in explaining the technical aspects of the watershed project. (This was mentioned by several interviewees.)

Educational work done by the Extension Service was very important. This and other educational work included newspaper articles, television broadcasts, guided tours through watershed area, county fair exhibits, field days, and information folders.

The active support of the county agent, through his soils agent's excellent job of selling the program, had much to do with the success of the project. Without this support, the watershed project might not have materialized.

The Extension Service did an excellent job in selling soil conservation practices to 4-H Clubs.

### Lions Club and Other Business Groups

The Lions Club, as a service organization, sponsored the first general meeting of farmers to explain the watershed program. The calling of this meeting had much to do with the success of the watershed.

Other business groups also played an active part.

It might have been difficult to put over the project if the Preston banker had not been for it, but he was enthusiastic in his support of the project. He assisted in, and contributed to the cost of, many educational projects designed to demonstrate the value of a watershed program.

### Many Organizations Working Together

Many groups and organizations worked together for the success of the program. Everyone concerned showed interest and enthusiasm.

When farmers observe that a majority of the people are for something, many of them decide that it must be all right. Also, many farmers were impressed by the several organizations, agencies, and other activities that supported the watershed project.

Some farmers compared the viewpoints of one agency or organization with those of others. Upon finding that they were in agreement, these farmers were further convinced of the soundness of the project.

### Absence of Partisan Politics

Local political parties had no part in organizing the watershed project or in its program. Nor were political parties or farm organizations asked to support the program and none were identified as doing so.

### County and Township Financial Support

When the county commissioners and township boards had become convinced of what the project would mean in benefits to roads, highways, and bridges, they pledged their support.

The county commissioners, county engineer, and township boards concerned made resolutions to the effect that their contributions, financial or otherwise, would be in relation to benefits received.

Fillmore County and certain townships recognized benefits that would come from the watershed project in reduced road and bridge maintenance. Fillmore County and Bristol and Carimona Townships contributed financially toward construction of the detention dams and gully-control measures, and Fillmore County assumed responsibility for maintenance of these structures.

### Donation of Easements by Farmers

The steering committee arranged for a meeting of some 30 to 40 farmers, together with their wives, at which time needed signatures to the papers granting easements were obtained so that certain structures might be constructed and maintained.

In many instances, the monetary contribution represented in easements and rights-of-way granted by the farmers amounted to a considerable sum (\$10,000 or more). Much credit is due the committee for its efforts in acquiring this type of cooperation, and to the farmers concerned.

### Church Support

Most of the churches in the watershed area observed soil-stewardship day annually. Also, at other church activity meetings, such as brotherhood meetings, the value of a watershed project to the community was discussed. The board of supervisors of the Soil Conservation District held an annual meeting and banquet in one of the churches in the watershed.

### Family Influence

In some instances, one member of a farm family sold other farmer members of the family on the watershed program.

### Vocational and Veteran Agricultural Instructors

Vocational and veteran agricultural instructors played their part in educational work, in conducting tours of the watershed area, and in helping to sponsor essay contests in soil conservation.



## Physical Characteristics of the Watershed

The size of the watershed, neither too large nor too small, its physical characteristics – rolling fields, bottom lands, and the creek running through – all lent themselves to the program planned and carried out to reduce flood and erosion damages.

## Values or Benefits Expected

Excerpts from reports of interviews show that many values or benefits were expected from the project. Some of these excerpts follow.

Prior to initiation of the watershed program many farmers in the watershed and people in Preston were conscious of damages that might occur from floods.

The economic well-being of the town of Preston depends in large degree upon farmers.

Preston's only banker enthusiastically supported the watershed program. He assisted in, and contributed to the cost of many educational projects designed to demonstrate the value of a watershed program.

After the county commissioners and township boards became convinced of what the program would mean in benefits to roads, highways, and bridges, they pledged their support. They contributed to the cost of construction of structures and the county agreed to maintain these structures.

With the soil conservation practices already applied it was not difficult to convince others of their value.

Farmers were ready for the watershed program.

Farmers supported the watershed program because they saw what conservation farming did on neighbors' farms.

One of the leading farmers in the area applied farm conservation practices to restore the productiveness of the badly eroded farm he had bought.

I have done conservation farming for several years because it increased my income.

The floodwater-retarding structure on the Scheevel farm proved its value to the farms below the structure and to Preston during a big rain in June 1959. Water in Preston came within 1 1/2 feet of the high-water level.

The Scheevel dam benefits farms below, roads, bridges, and Preston.

Land should be protected for future generations.









